WRITING LIKE A READER: DEVELOPING METALINGUISTIC UNDERSTANDING TO SUPPORT READING-WRITING CONNECTIONS

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Abstract

Becoming a writer is a challenging task, and one of the few tasks where the cognitive demands do not decrease with maturity because '*as writers mature and gain expertise, they invest more effort and reflective thought in the task'* (Kellogg 1994, p.204). Part of this reflective effort relates to an increased awareness of the implied reader of the text and a more goal-oriented sense of what the writing should achieve. Arguably, this requires the writer to hold in mind both his/her writerly intentions and the imagined response of the reader to the emerging text. Barrs &Cork (2001) conceive of the notion of '*the reader in the writer'*; however, our interest is in the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing, not simply 'reading like a writer' but also 'writing like a reader'. Drawing on data from writing conversation interviews with students aged 9-14 over three years, this chapter will explore these young writers' developing metalinguistic understanding of how to shape and craft their written texts to satisfy both their own authorial intentions and the needs of the reader.

Introduction

Becoming a writer is a challenging task, and one of the few tasks where the cognitive demands do not decrease with maturity because '*as writers mature and gain expertise, they invest more effort and reflective thought in the task'* (Kellogg 1994, p.204). Part of this reflective effort relates to an increased awareness of the implied reader of the text and a more goal-oriented sense of what the writing should achieve. Arguably, this requires the writer to hold in mind both his/her writerly intentions and the imagined response of the reader to the emerging text. There is, of course, a substantive body of research examining the relationships between reading and writing (Langer & Flihan 2000, Shanahan 1987, 2006) but this has predominantly addressed how reading and writing share common cognitive processes and knowledge, arguing that there is a common cognitive system for understanding written language and a bidirectional relationship between reading and writing (Parodi 2006). A more modest body of research has considered, from a socio-cultural perspective, that the experience of being a reader and being a writer can be reciprocally supportive (Butler & Turbill 1984, Blatt & Rosen 1987, Barrs & Cork 2001).

However, the emphasis in empirical and theoretical studies on this reciprocality between reading and writing has tended to focus upon developing readers' awareness of the writer's purpose and intentions. Smith (1983) argued that children '*must read like a writer, in order to learn how to write like a writer. There is no other way in which the intricate complexity of a writer's knowledge can be acquired*' (1983, p.562), and he maintains that through this reading like a writer '*we engage with the author in what the author is writing*' (1983, p.563). Bruner (1986) considers how the reader subjectively constructs meaning from the written text, in effect, taking the written text and 'writing' their own version, filling the '*gaps that call upon the reader to become a writer, a composer of a virtual [prosthetic] text in response to the actual one'* (1986, p.24). More recently, Bazerman puts the same stress upon readers becoming more aware of the writer and their purposes:

> *Being aware of the writer's purpose when you read helps you evaluate how well the writer has achieved the purpose and decide whether you want to follow where the writer is trying to lead you. The active reader reads more than the words and more than even the ideas: the active reader reads what the writer is doing. The active reader reconstructs the overall design, both the writer's purpose and the techniques used to realize that purpose*. (Bazerman 2010, p.104)

To an extent, one could argue that this framing of reading like a writer is more about higher level comprehension than it is about becoming a writer, developing understanding of authorial intention, and recognition that it is the reader who makes the meaning from the text. In contrast, Barrs & Cork's (2001) study does look more closely at how reading experiences can support writing and being a writer. They worked with primary aged children and considered how writing might improve when children have the opportunity to engaging with rich and challenging literature. Significantly, they also looked at the pedagogical practices which accompanied this approach, particularly examining the nature of the classroom interventions the teachers made in relation both to the published text and to children's own emerging texts. At the heart of the study was a deep and rich engagement with high-quality texts that spoke to children's own experiences, but it also included '*sustained discussion of particular aspects of the author's way of writing and of the literary features of the text*' (Barrs & Cork 2001, p. 80), thus explicitly drawing attention to how the writer shaped the text as well as what the text was communicating. Our own interest, however, is very much in the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing, not simply 'reading like a writer' but also 'writing like a reader': we are concerned not only in how rich texts can support writing development through developing awareness of the author's choices and intentions, but also how writing development can be enriched through encouraging young writers' to articulate their own choices and intentions in relation to their imagined readers. This chapter will explore young writers' developing metalinguistic understanding of

how to shape and craft their written texts to satisfy both their own authorial intentions as writers and the (imagined) needs of the reader, drawing on a study which uniquely considers the bidirectionality between reading and writing through attention to writers' choices in published texts and young writers' choices in their own texts.

Metalinguistic Understanding and Meaning-Making in Writing

Conceptually, this chapter draws on a cumulative series of empirical studies, investigating how explicit teaching of the relationship between grammar and making meaning in writing can improve student outcomes in writing through increased metalinguistic understanding (Myhill et al 2013, Myhill et al 2013, Jones et al 2013). Theoretically, the sequence of studies are underpinned by a Hallidayan view of '*grammar as a meaning-making resource'* (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, p.10). This stands in contrast to traditional views of grammar as concerned principally with correct use of forms, adherence to rules, and a heavy focus on the 'parts' of a clause or sentence. Halliday's theorisation of grammar is systemic, requiring us to '*understand the nature and the dynamic of a semiotic system as a whole*' (2004, p.20) and the inter-related nature of grammatical choices in creating text. In this way, grammatical choices are part of the repertoire through which writers shape meanings in text – grammatical forms shape meaning in as potent a way as do lexical or figurative choices. So, for example, George Orwell's opening of *1984* – '*It was a bright cold day in April and the clocks were striking thirteen*' – foreshadows the dystopian focus of the novel, not simply through semantic choices, but also through the grammatical choices. The paralleling of two simple clauses through a co-ordinating conjunction juxtaposes the everyday idea of a bright cold day in April with the extraordinary idea of clocks striking thirteen, positioning both as statements of truth. Moreover, the choice of a plural for 'clocks' suggests this is a not a single occurrence with one clock but involves all clocks: in this world it is normal for clocks to strike thirteen and the dystopian thrust is established. Our research has adopted this view of grammar as a way of making-meaning to support young writers in developing understanding that grammatical choices are part of the repertoire through which writers shape meanings in text.

Central to this conceptual framing is metalinguistic understanding (Gombert 1992), specifically *'the ability to take language as the object of observation and the referent of discourse'* (Camps & Milian 1999, p.6). Although metalinguistic understanding is by definition explicit, the act of writing is also governed by implicit knowledge and automated processes. We know that there is a strong relationship between reading and writing, and that students who are keen readers often draw on their reading experiences in the shaping of written texts. We acknowledge the powerful significance of this implicit knowledge in writing, and the way reading develops 'writerly knowledge' which enthusiastic readers can draw on in their writing without conscious or explicit decision-making. At the same time, many school learners are not keen readers, and moreover, not all keen readers seem able to draw on this implicit knowledge in their own writing. Fitzgerald & Shanahan (2000) note that one knowledge base which connects reading is metaknowledge, defined as '*knowing about the functions and purposes of reading and writing; knowing that readers and writers interact; monitoring one's own meaning-making'* (2000, p.175). With this in mind, our interest has been in how developing metalinguistic knowledge of the choices available to writers can be fostered through explicit teaching of linguistic structures and their meaning-making effects in authentic texts, developing writers' metaknowledge of the inter-relationship of reading and writing, and their capacity to monitor their own creation of meanings.

Methodology

The data for this chapter draw on a four year Economic and Social Research Council -funded study which addressed the research question: what is the relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and understanding, and development in writing? The research design was an in-depth longitudinal cross-phase qualitative study, comprising the tracking of 2 primary classes (age 9-11: *n* = 57) and 2 secondary classes (age

12-14: *n* = 52), each in four different comprehensive schools, over three years, tracing the development of their metalinguistic understanding and their development in writing. From each of these classes, nine children (3 high-attaining in writing; 3 average-attaining; and 3 lower-attaining) were selected to form case study samples, using teacher assessment against national standards for the primary cohort, and externally-assessed national assessment data for the secondary cohort.

The teachers involved received professional development workshops, supporting their capability in making explicit connections between writers' linguistic choices in authentic texts and students' own choices as writers, adopting the Hallidayan conceptualisation outlined above. The pedagogical framework used in these workshops has been developed through cumulative studies, and is founded upon four pedagogical principles (see table 1)

Pedagogical Principle	**Theoretical Rationale**
1. **Make a link** between the grammar being introduced and how it works in the writing being taught.	To make explicit the connection between grammatical form and how it creates meaning in context.
Example of Practice: Share the reading of the episode in Michael Morpurgo's story, *Arthur, High King of Britain* where the sword, Excalibur, rises from the lake, and look at how the use of clauses where the subject comes after the verb shapes the portrayal of a dramatic moment in the plot.	
2. Explain the **grammar through examples**, not lengthy explanations.	To focus learner attention on the form as used in context, not on grammatical naming and identification.
Example of Practice: Explain the subject-verb inversion through showing the text examples, highlighting in colour the position of the subject after the verb.	
3. Build in **high-quality discussion** about grammar and its effects.	To support both thinking and verbalisation of metalinguistic understanding about the relationship between grammatical choices and meaning-making.
Example of Practice: Stimulate discussion of Morpurgo's choice to invert the subject and verb by inviting students to consider how structuring the clauses differently in the more standard S-V order creates a different effect, particularly how the subject-verb inversion alters how we visualise this moment in the plot. Later invite children to articulate how they have structured clauses in their own story to influence how the reader sees that plot moment.	
4. Use examples from **authentic texts**	To link developing writers to the broader community of writers, drawing attention to the grammatical choices that published writers make.
Example of Practice: The use of an authentic children's narrative text – *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo.	

Table 1: the four pedagogical principles with their theoretical rationales and examples of practice

In the professional development workshops, the teachers worked with the research team to co-create teaching units, and the research team supported the teachers' grammatical knowledge, where necessary. As it was a longitudinal study following two cohorts of students, the teachers changed each year: thus the

workshops were repeated each year with new teachers, but did also use data from the previous year's study to illustrate both successful and less successful practice.

A rich set of qualitative data was collected, including samples of student writing taken from each teaching unit observed and one piece of writing which was undertaken by the whole sample at the beginning and the end of the study; and teacher lesson plans, lesson observations and video. This chapter, however, draws on the 'writing conversation' interview, developed for the study, in which students' metalinguistic understanding was probed through talking about their own writing, or those of peers. Methodologically, this avoided questions which invited generalised responses and focused the conversation on what the student could discuss in relation to his or her own metalinguistic understanding about their own, or peers', authorial intentions and writerly choices. The writing conversations were conducted with the case study students twice a year, after each of the observed teaching units had been completed: in total, there were 94 primary writing conversations and 96 secondary writing conversations, as not all of the nine case study students selected in year 1 remained in the school, or the project classes.

The writing conversations were analysed inductively using Nvivo, resulting in a set of thematic clusters: *Grammar-writing Relationship; Grammatical Reasoning; Pedagogical Practices; Metacognition; Metalinguistic Understanding;* and *Handling the Reader-Writer Relationship*. It is the analysis located in this last cluster which this chapter will address.

Findings

The coding under the thematic heading of *Handling the Reader-Writer Relationship* was categorised under three sub-themes: *Awareness of Reader Needs; Choice of Effects;* and *Content Focus*. Table 2 below sets out the definition of each of these codes with examples from the data.

Sub-code	Definition	Example
Awareness of Reader Needs	Comments which suggest that the student has anticipated the reader's response and/or made writing decisions with the reader in mind	*I realised that if I described the statue first then the reader would hopefully have the idea of what the statue actually looked like…it creates a clearer picture in the reader's head so the reader can actually understand what's actually going on rather than jumping to what is happening.*
Choice of Effects	Comments which show awareness of effectiveness of language choices made as a writer	*I felt that it's good to use a short sentence because then people that can stick into their minds for when they do have a choice of taking alcohol or not taking drugs…*'Alcohol can cause accidents*'.*
Content Focus	Comments which focus on the message or the ideas in the writing	*Well my finishing paragraph, I said '*Blue cross are always open and with your support they always will be*.' So it's saying that you're helping with your support it will continue and it won't stop it will continue to save animals.*

Table 2: The sub-codes for the theme, Handling the Reader-Writer Relationship

Table 3 below shows how many interview comments were coded to each of the sub-codes in each year of the study. They do reveal a pattern of a growing number of comments which relate to language choices and

to the communicative content of the writing, which is almost certainly a response to the study's interventions, but a more static outcome in responses reflecting reader awareness.

	PRIMARY				SECONDARY			
Year	*1*	*2*	*3*	*ALL*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*ALL*
Reader Awareness	13	14	14	**41**	22	21	13	**56**
Choice of Effects	8	16	27	**51**	16	31	26	**73**
Content Focus	12	27	33	**72**	12	40	30	**82**
Total no of interviews	35	31	28	**94**	36	31	29	**96**

Table 3: the frequency of responses coded in the theme, Handling the Reader-Writer Relationship

This growth in volume of comments is represented graphically in figure 1, suggesting that developmentally this growing awareness is linked to age. It is important to note, of course, that this statistical data simply reflect the number of comments, not the quality of thinking which they represent. This is explored more critically in the qualitative analysis further below.

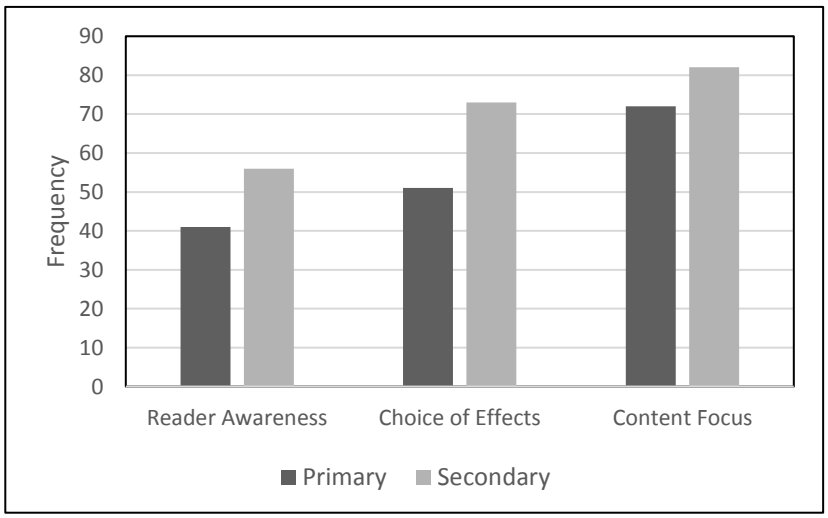

Figure 1: comparing sub-code frequencies across primary and secondary age cohorts

Awareness of Reader Needs

One aspect of authorial intention is the capacity to anticipate or envision how a real or imagined reader of your writing will interpret what you have written. The writer has to 'de-centre' from his or her own understanding of what is being written and project an interpretation from the reader's perspective. In England, there has for a long time been a considerable emphasis on the notion of 'audience' for a text, including its inclusion in examination assessment criteria. Ironically, the word 'audience' points to a listening community not a readership and although young writers know that audience is important, genuine understanding of the needs of a imagined reader or consideration of how as a writer we might choose to position our reader is less strongly developed. The writing conversations revealed that students do have reader awareness but that it is a developing awareness, as might be expected of young writers of this age, rather than a secure and rounded understanding of how they can shape their writing to fulfil their authorial intentions.

One cluster of comments in this theme indicated that some children conceive of their reader principally in terms of *what* is communicated, not *how* they might influence their reader's response. Sometimes these were very literal communications of facts and information to the reader, such as the 9 year-old who believed

his description of Komodo dragon habitats could be used by '*the keepers of the Komodo dragon or something like that in zoos'* or the 13 year-old who wanted to be sure that her narrative plot was clearly communicated and argued that her intention was to '*just basically tell people what happened and describe what happened*'. For others, there was a little more nuance to the desire to communicate clearly, going beyond the transfer of facts to include a perspective on those facts. For example, a 10 year-old, writing a persuasive speech in the context of a cross-curricular study of the Ancient Greeks, wanted not only to inform his reader about the lives of ancient Greek fisherman, but to help them realise that '*it's hard, fishing, hard work'*.

However, there were many students in both primary and secondary age ranges who had a more secure awareness that as writers they could influence or affect how their reader responds to their writing. For some, this was a recognition that different implied readers required different kinds of writing, such as the 9 year-old, tasked with writing a letter to Dahl's character, Willy Wonka, who noted that her formal address to '*Mr Willy Wonka'* was important because '*it's not just an ordinary chat, it's like if you were working and you send a letter to your boss you wouldn't just go like 'Oh hello Mr Wonka*'. A common awareness was that writing could create an emotional response and many of the young writers commented on an emotion which they hoped to stir in their readers:

- '*we wanted them to feel sorry for Noah because he's lost his dad*' (11 year-old)
- '*I'm trying to make them feel scared*' (9 year-old)
- '*if you were reading it and you heard that story … it would make you very emotional and you probably wouldn't want to, like, try not to be peer pressured into drinking'*. (13 year-old)
- '*the past tense one, I wanted people to feel sorry for the soldier but also like it's like happened and you can't really do anything about it and like we don't want it to happen again'*. (13 year-old)
- '*I want them to feel like they're in the story… alongside it*.' (11 year-old)

For a smaller number of writers, there was an awareness of how they could manage the telling of a story or the communication of information in particular ways. One 11 year-old wanted to manage the mood of a narrative so that the reader would '*feel that it's really calm and then all of a sudden it gets really, it's peaceful, and then all of a sudden it gets really tense… and it goes back to being calm again*'. Another 10 year-old used sub-headings in an information text to manage the information on behalf of their reader: '*you have a section on weather, a section on houses, a section on food so they can go onto the different sections and they know that it's not just all together, it's in sections that you can just read about*'.

There was also a cluster of responses in which students echoed advice frequently given by teachers relating to reader awareness, particularly concerning the use of descriptive detail to '*make a picture in its head*' (9 year-old) or a '*picture in their mind*' (12 year-old). Students also referred to the need to try and draw their reader in so '*people feel like they're more part of it'* (12 year-old), or to create suspense so that readers *'feel they don't know what will happen next*' (12 year-old). There was also a sense in some writers that their readers might be less than motivated, making writers attend to keeping them reading, '*otherwise readers can get really bored and kind of stop reading*' (12 year-old). There were multiple references to making '*them want to read on*' and to keeping their readers interested. These do reflect the efforts of teachers to develop greater reader awareness, although the repertoire of implied reader responses is rather narrow.

It was also evident, particularly for older students, that the most important reader was the teacher, not any task-specified imaginary reader, and students were conscious of trying to impress their teacher-reader with the kinds of choices in writing they felt would secure success. This was either by using arguments they thought would appeal to their teacher or by setting out to demonstrate language choices they believed were important:

- *I think Mr B wanted like bossy verbs because it's like telling them to do it exactly* (10 year-old)
- *I wanted to show my teacher that I can do what he was trying to get us to do so like the similes and the description and all* of that (10 year-old)
- *Since Year 7 you're always writing for the teacher, you're writing to show your understanding within lessons* (14 year-old)
- *I did two rhetorical questions next to each other to make the reader really think because Miss said that rhetorical questions make sure the reader thinks* (14 year-old)

One 14 year-old able writer explicitly articulates this awareness of the teacher as reader, but retains her own authorial view. She explains why she has used a particular relative clause and says '*I know you're supposed to say like, it adds more detail, when it's like that but I just think varying sentence types is always more interesting for someone to assess or read it'.* Overall, the students' responses in this sub-code indicate that young writers appear to have a developing reader awareness over time but that there is also considerable scope for considering how writing instruction might support a stronger and more mature understanding of the reader. The data also highlight the existence of tensions for these school writers between an imaginary 'real' audience and the 'real' audience of the teacher.

Choice of effects

The student responses in this sub-code related to their ability to verbalise and explain the language choices they had made. Some of these responses show that students were able to explicitly comment on their choices. Often these young writers referred to using description in the writing, such as the 10 year-old who explained that she *'was trying to get good descriptive words telling you exactly what it's about and what it does*' or the 12 year-old who noted that her writing was '*really descriptive'* and cited as evidence her sentence '*The trees were covered with green leaves, the grass was growing in rhythm with the wind, bluebells decorated the ditches, fallen trees and fences'.* Comments like this reflected an articulation of a choice but with no direct discussion of how it might shape a reader's response (although the use of 'you' in the first quotation was common across the dataset as a rather generalised way of referring to an implied reader). But students were also able to make more direct links between a choice and its possible effect on a reader. An 11 year-old maintained that the sentence '*her heart hammered and her soul got sucked up like in a tornado*' was a description '*so the reader actually knows like what it felt like*'. Another writer felt that the choice of direct address through the use of the pronoun 'you' was '*like you're bringing them into it… You're engaging them'* (13 year-old). Many of the responses focused on the effect of particular word choices, as in this example from a 10 year-old talking about a piece of persuasive writing:

> *When I did the last, 'it's a dream deeply rooted in every designer's dream', I put 'deeply rooted' because like some people just put 'planted into' … but I thought well if you put 'planted' it can be easily pulled out and if you put 'deeply rooted' it will be like a tree stump, it would be harder to come off.'*

One older writer reflected that her vocabulary choices had matured over the three years to become more deliberate although there is no explicit discussion of why these choices are more effective than those in earlier years:

> *' 'my heart beats rhythmically', 'my breathing is steady': I think that's a little more, I think my vocabulary is, I'm more aware of like where I'm putting it in whereas in Year 7 I think I was just trying to cram in like a load of fancy words and just took time to describe things and I think in*

Year 9 I knew what I was doing more and I was intentionally trying to use better vocabulary, so it's a bit more composed than my Year 7 one'. (14 year-old)

Students were less likely to comment on syntactical choices, but there were those who were aware that syntactic choices could alter how the information in a sentence was communicated. In one writing task, stimulated by the novel they had been reading as a class, students composed a letter in role to two sisters trying to persuade them to allow their young brother to leave home to attend a boarding school. One writer discussed why his choice of the active voice '*You have raised him extremely well*' was better than the passive version which did not make clear who had raised the boy – '*it could have been anybody'*. Another student explained why her choice to put '*Closer and closer I go*' at the start of her sentence creates a sense of build-up which is not achieved by a standard subject verb sentence:

'*If you say 'I went closer and closer' that's sort of like you know what happened but if you're saying 'closer and closer' it's sort of like you're building up to something that is going to happen'*. (14 year-old)

It was also evident, however, that many students struggled to verbalise precisely the effect of their choices on their real or imagined reader. Sometimes students correctly identified a link between a choice and effect but could not explain why that choice had that effect. One 9 year-old writing a narrative explained that she wanted her description of a dragon make the reader '*feel scared*' and felt that her simile '*like a scorched vampire'* made the dragon more scary because '*it's like a vampire and its scorching*' . Similarly, one writer indirectly identifies her verb choices in '*He barged into the room and pushed the doors open*' as helping the reader infer character, but she does not articulate this directly, instead suggesting these choices show '*he must be annoyed or something'* (11 year-old). Another writer tries to explain the choice of first person perspective in a narrative as '*it's more personal and it's more around one person and what they've experienced rather than a lot of other people'* (13 year-old). There were many examples like this where students were choosing features of their writing which did appear to be explicit choices but where the challenge of verbalising how the choice achieves a particular effect was clear. There is a sense, nonetheless, in these comments of young writers on the brink of a higher level of metalinguistic understanding.

Elsewhere, however, students' articulation of the effect of their choices revealed substantial reliance on the teachers' explanations of choices and effects, leading to some echoing of teachers' verbalisations which may not represent full understanding. Some of these responses also reflect the current emphases of the national assessment of writing for 11 year-olds in England, including the need to use varied punctuation such as brackets, dashes and ellipsis. One 11 year-old noted an ellipsis in his writing and claimed he used it '*because it adds tension'*, mirroring the teacher's explanation. Other responses suggest the students are repeating back things teachers have encouraged them to do, such as the writer who explains that his use of alliteration '*gives it a really good picture'* (10 year-old); or the writer who feels their modal verbs '*make the reader feel involved'* (12 year-old). In one example, the student tries to explain the effect of sentence length variety but in fact echoes teacher comments relating to adding detail, building tension, hooking readers in and keeping the reader interested without any coherent explanation of how this relates to length:

'Some sentences make you add more detail into your writing instead of just using simple sentences and shorter ones and longer ones. Sometimes shorter sentences help build climax but then you can give a load of detail about what's actually happening. Then you can hook them in with like the long sentences, like at the beginning there's an average sized one which hooks them in and then you can use different types from then on. Because then they're interested'. (12 year-old)

Content Focus

A substantial set of student responses (*n* = 72 for primary and *n* = 82 for secondary)were coded as *Content-Focused,* where students tended to focus more on *what* they were writing, than *how* they were writing it: figure 1 indicates that both primary and secondary students made more responses categorised as content-focussed than they did for the other sub-codes. In part, this relates to the questions they were asked: questions intended to prompt discussion of linguistic choices and their effects were often answered with reference to the content of the writing. This may be because they did not understand the intended focus of the question:

Interviewer: What have you learnt about doing this kind of writing?
Student: That frogs are very energetic and they hibernate in mud which I never knew before. (9 year-old)

* * *

Interviewer: What were you learning in this piece of writing?
Student: We were learning about Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and Mr Willy Wonka and we were pretending to be his chief taste managers. (9 year-old)

* * *

Interviewer: Are there any of your sentences that you think 'Oh I like the way I've shaped that sentence' or 'Oh I like the way I've written that sentence?'
Student: Vesuvius the great town protector.
Interviewer: And why do you like that one?
Student: Because it tells us how Vesuvius is protecting the world. (9 year-old)

Just as in the *Awareness of Reader Needs* comments, there were students whose concern was principally with the message they wished to communicate to the reader, so too here some students were more conscious of the topic of their writing than how that topic was shaped. So one student, when asked what advice she would give someone else who was writing an information text, responds with safety advice related to the content of her information text: '*Like the equipment you're getting out and all of that, because some of it might be sharp some of it might be soft but you need to tell them what it feels like because they cut themselves or something*' (10 year-old). This emphasis on the literal content of the writing is also evident in these examples:

Interviewer: Just pick me out one or two best bits of your description.
Student: '*They jumped down off the stand. I jumped back in horror'*…because you would get like get horrified if something jumps down towards you, so you would jump back. (9 year-old)

* * *

Interviewer: So can you find the bit that you think sounds just right?
Student: I think the beginning bit

Interviewer: '*Time for work is in school and not at home, home time is <u>our</u> time'* and you've underlined 'our' twice haven't you. So can you just attempt to explain to me why you like the sound of that?

Student: Because it's like saying we work but we still need time for ourselves.
9 year-old

These comments with a strong content focus may indicate that students provide a literal account of events or ideas in their writing because these are more tangible and easier to describe than are their linguistic choices and how they shape intended meanings in the text. However, the emphasis on content is in line with Langer's (1986) findings that the students principal concern was with the meanings they were developing, reflecting the primacy of the communicative content in young writers' thinking, rather than a concern with the 'how' of communication.

Discussion

This analysis of how explicit metalinguistic teaching can draw upon the affordances of both reading and writing to strengthen writers' understanding of the authorial choices provides evidence both of children's capacity to understand how to write with their reader in mind, and of the challenges that that this poses. Because the nature of the intervention focused strongly on developing metalinguistic understanding of the choices writers make in texts and thus of the choices developing writers can make in their own texts, it is not surprising that over time their metalinguistic understanding grows and their writerly decision-making develops. Unlike many previous studies (eg Langer 1986, MacArthur 2008) these students did not foreground surface features, such as spelling, in their writing conversations but were genuinely engaged in considering how their writing was creating meaning. The data also indicate, however, that reader awareness (which was not an explicit focus of the interventions) may need stronger pedagogical guidance to make the language choices a writer makes more robustly linked to imagined reader responses.

One clear strand of evidence in the data relates to some students' struggle to verbalise the meaning-making effect of a particular language choice. It's important to recognise here that verbalisation makes metalinguistic understanding tangibly evident and available for consideration, but the inability to verbalise may not reflect an absence of metalinguistic understanding. Camps & Milian (1999) distinguish between verbalisable and non-verbalisable metalinguistic knowledge, arguing that there are students who are making deliberate choices but who may be unable to verbalise them. Roehr (2008:179) described metalinguistic understanding as '*declarative knowledge that can be brought into awareness and that is potentially available for verbal report'*. Our interest has been in this 'potential availability' of verbalisation and how teachers can support the development from potential to actual availability, drawing on theoretical thinking about metatalk and the power of talk for learning (Myhill & Newman 2016). The struggle that students face in verbalising the rationale for their choices may simply reflect development in metalinguistic understanding – as young writers they may be able to make appropriate and effective choices in writing *before* they are able to articulate this clearly. Certainly the evidence in the writing samples supports the idea that explicit teaching about choices results in students who use those patterns in their writing but not all are consciously aware that they have done so. However, the writing conversation data also suggest that verbalising may be hard because students are genuinely searching to find the right words to voice their choices – an emergent understanding on the brink of verbalisation. Thus, how teachers support these moments of emergent understanding is important, and teachers' own capacity to model verbalisation of writerly choices may itself need further development (see Myhill & Newman 2016) as this is an unfamiliar way of working, certainly in the educational context of the UK.

Additionally, this paper draws particular attention to a pedagogy which makes explicit connections between reading and writing, particularly writers' choices in authentic texts as models for supporting students' understanding of the repertoire of choices available to them as writers. One critical aspect of pedagogy which the writing conversations highlight is how teachers enable the development of metalinguistic understanding in these young writers. The Barrs & Cork study (2001) used '*orchestrated discussion'* and '*texts as models or writing'* (2001, p.72) as part of their pedagogical approach, and this included explicit attention to how the writer used language, for example, how '*a writer used language to convey atmosphere or build up suspense' or how a writer 'used dialogue as part of characterisation'* (2001, p.72). However, they conclude that *'the direct teaching of particular features of prose…is less likely to produce good writing than is a close focus on the meanings that children want to express*' (2001, p.203). We would argue that it is the integration of the direct teaching *with* the discussion of meaning that is critical, bringing reading and writing together. At the same time, our data suggest that teachers need to broaden the repertoire of ways to discuss the relationship between language choices and meaning-making from a rather routinised focus on adding visual detail, creating suspense, hooking the reader in, and making the reader want to read on, which are echoed back in the writing conversations, to a richer and more nuanced repertoire of language and meaning-making relationships.

The data does also highlight the tension for students between school writing and real writing, particularly in terms of their awareness of the dual audience of teacher and imaginary reader, but also in terms of their awareness of the assessment expectations for writing. Andrews & Smith (2011) argue that school writing can over-emphasise form, leading to '*a static and formulaic conception of what language can do'*, and that there is '*too limited a sense of audience and function so that writing becomes an activity that supports assessment requirements'* (2011, p.9), arguments which our data appear to support.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered young writers' metalinguistic understanding of how to make language choices to shape meaning in their own written texts, drawing on the models provided by authentic texts. The pedagogical approach adopted encourages writers to recognise the language choices writers make and to be more explicitly aware of the choices they make in their own writing. Through the voices of the writing conversations with these young writers, we have drawn attention to the particular affordances of a pedagogy which integrates reading and writing within a Hallidayan conceptualisation of grammar as a meaning-making resource, but we have also drawn attention to the challenges that some students face in verbalising their metalinguistic understanding and the constraints that 'schooled writing' can impose upon their learning. It is evident that the role of the teacher in supporting a bidirectional learning relationship between reading and writing is a critical one, and there is a clear need for more empirical research which investigates pedagogical aspects of the integration of reading and writing in instructional settings.

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